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California Polytechnic State University

June 24, 2003

Following is the commencement address given in closing by Cal Poly President Warren J. Baker at both of Cal Poly's Spring Commencement ceremonies June 14, 2003.

Warren J. Baker**Graduates:**

We are drawing toward the end of our ceremony and as I look out at all the smiling faces, I can't help but think how happy you are as you celebrate this well deserved recognition. But I am sure you also recognize that you did not get here entirely on your own. Over the years you have been at Cal Poly, the faculty have worked to teach you, support you, and inspire you. They have dedicated their professional lives to their students and to their disciplines. They have earned our appreciation and respect. I would like to ask the faculty to please stand, and I invite our graduates today to join me in expressing our appreciation to the Cal Poly faculty.

There is another group of people that must also be recognized. They are your strongest supporters, giving you encouragement and love as well as considerable help. I know they take great pride in your accomplishments today, and your graduation is a singular achievement on their part as well. It is altogether right that the graduating class join with the entire University in expressing the appreciation we feel for your parents and spouses, many of whom are present here today.

Will all of the parents and spouses please stand. Let's give them a round of applause.

And now, following the tradition of commencement ceremonies everywhere, it is my responsibility and pleasure as University President to deliver a brief charge to the graduates.

During your years here, the University has tried to assist you in finding some of the means you will need to achieve success and fulfillment in your lives. But "What's past is prologue." One door is quietly closing today while another is opening onto a larger world in which each of you must discover your own way.

This discovery, however, cannot be passive. People do not just "find" themselves. They must, rather, CREATE themselves through their actions. Men and women can achieve personal identities only by making decisions that require forethought and, at times, courage. They must look beyond what is known and tried to what is, as yet, unknown and untried.

To arrive at these choices in your life I urge you first to seek after truth. To do otherwise could mean that you become enslaved to a falsehood. Those who know the least are willing to obey shallow and popular falsehoods the most readily. So be guided by truth, not by what is only convenient or fashionable. The truth will free you to create your unique identity. Explore the world of ideas. Be curious. Continue to learn. Your education does not come to an end with this ceremony today; in the most important ways it has just begun.

I urge you also to continue to seek greater meaning in your life. This may require an act of faith when faced with the chaos and complexity and even the insane brutality that exist in parts of the world today. I advise you, though, to hew close to your family and friends, to venerate your religion, to find solace in nature, and to support and build upon the arts and culture that sustain us all. As you step forward to a new world of opportunity, I urge you to heed the words of Mahatma Gandhi when he described the seven deadly sins, warning us about science without humanity; politics without principle; knowledge without character; wealth without work; commerce without morality; pleasure without conscience; and worship without sacrifice. Your spirit requires nourishment. Attend to it or it will shrivel and die.

I urge you to strive as well to make sure justice informs all human affairs. Practice charity and forbearance in your daily life. And know that you and I, all peoples, even the weakest and least fortunate among us, share a common humanity. Your responsibilities to your community, to your fellow human beings, extend beyond narrow self-interests. If you, who are the best and brightest, do not work to improve society, who will?

And finally, I urge you to understand the dignity of human aspirations. The ability to hope, to dream of a brighter future, in some ways shows what it means to be human. We cherish this quality in ourselves. You must see to it, then, that the dreams of others are not destroyed by prejudice and discrimination, by poverty and ignorance.

Class of 2003, a world of challenge and opportunity awaits you. It is likely that you will be tested. but I believe you will be up to the test when you make your decisions always on the side of truth and virtue.

We hope, too, that you will fondly remember Cal Poly in the years ahead. We have a growing extended family of enthusiastic Cal Poly alumni. As you depart Cal Poly now, we trust that you will become an active member of that family, stay in touch and come back to visit when you can. We'll keep the porch light on for you.

We are going to miss you and certainly Cal Poly is a better place because you were here. As you depart today, our feelings perhaps can best be expressed in those beautiful thoughts and words from the Brothers Karamazov, at the end, when the boys gather, Ayosha says "Let us agree that we shall never forget one another; that whatever happens, remember how good it felt when we were all here together united by a good and decent feeling which made us better people -- probably than we would otherwise have been."

Congratulations and best wishes to all of you.

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